ECLIPSE COMICS

THE TWISTED TALES OF BRUCE JONES

Part 2 of 4

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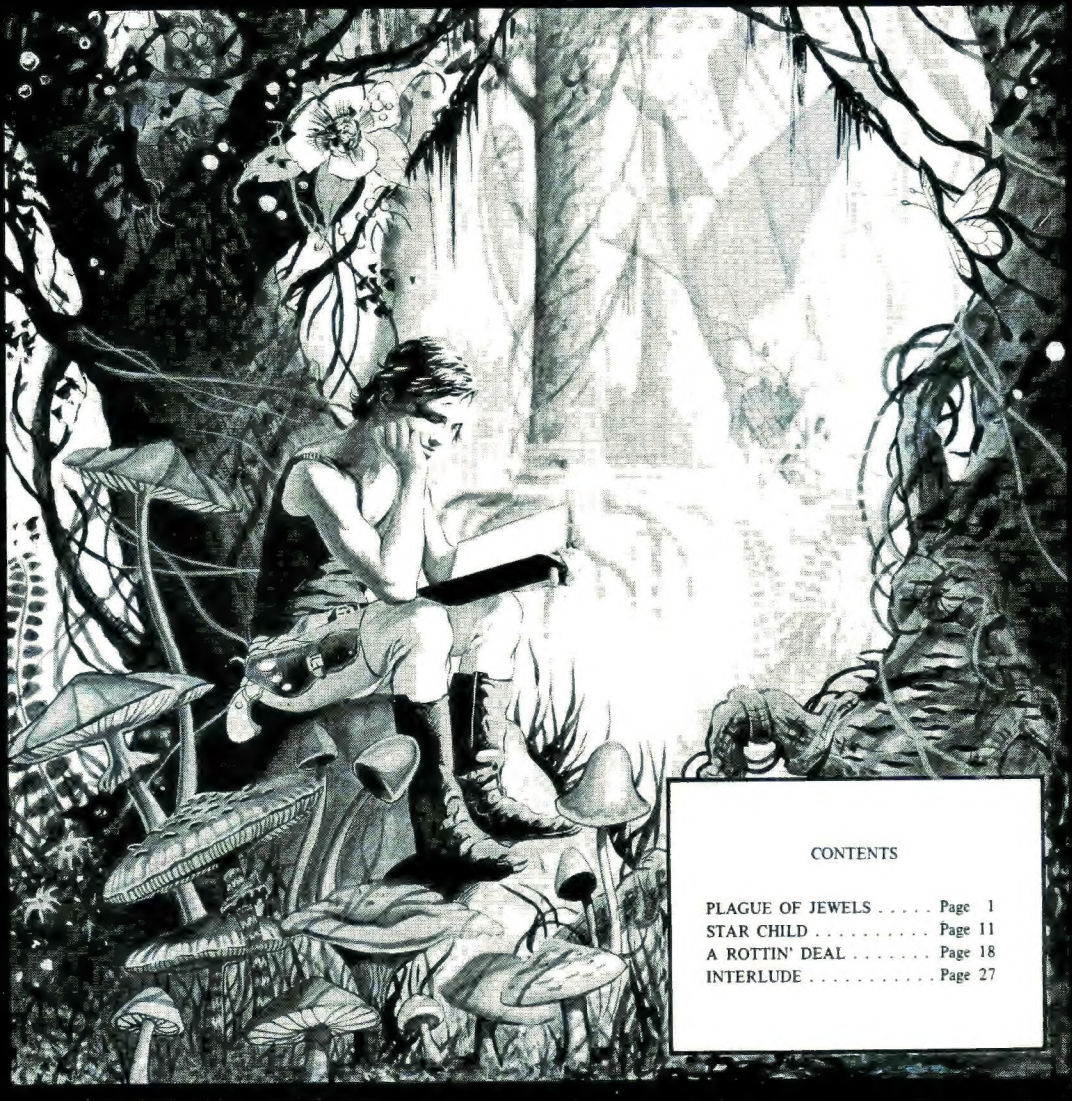

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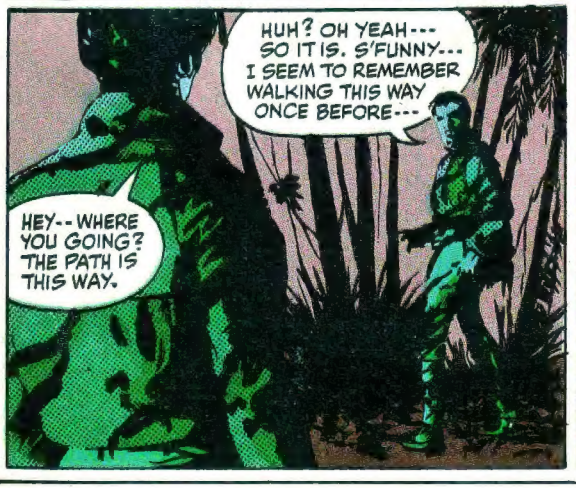
RUNNING-- FASTER AND FASTER-- SWEAT BEADING, FLYING FROM YOUR FOREHEAD-- EYES BLURRING-- CAVERN WALLS DISAPPEARING-- BLENDING TOGETHER--
GOTTA GIT OUTTA HERE---
CAN'T LET 'EM GET ME--
THEY CHASE-- COME CLOSER-- SMELL THEIR ODOR-- A HORRID OVERPOWERING SCENT-- LIKE SOMETHING DEAD FOR A THOUSAND YEARS---
CHASING-- COMING EVER CLOSER-- EVER CLOSER-- ALMOST ON YOU--
TRIPPING--- FALLING---
PLAGUE OF JEWELS
NO! NO! KEEP AWAY FROM ME!
BRUCE JONES '71

Script and Art by: BRUCE JONES Colors: MARCUS DAVID

GARY-- WAKE UP--- WAKE UP-- YOU'RE DREAMING.

I WAS THERE AGAIN--- BEING CHASED BY THOSE THINGS--THOSE GOD-FORSAKEN THINGS-- IT WAS HORRIBLE-- TERRIFYING.
FORGET IT, CHUM. JUST THINK OF THE MONEY-- THAT GLORIOUS MONEY! WHEN WE'RE OUTTA THIS STINK-HOLE AND BACK TO CIVILIZATION, WE'LL BE TWO VERY RICH MEN.

THANK ME FOR THAT, WAYNE. IF THAT DAME HADN'T FALLEN FOR ME, WE WOULDN'T HAVE HER JEWELS NOW!
SURE, HANDSOME, SURE. WELL, IT'S ALMOST DAWN ANY-WAY. MIGHT AS WELL GET MOVING.


HUH? OH YEAH--- SO IT IS. S'FUNNY--- I SEEM TO REMEMBER WALKING THIS WAY ONCE BEFORE---
HEY-- WHERE YOU GOING? THE PATH IS THIS WAY.

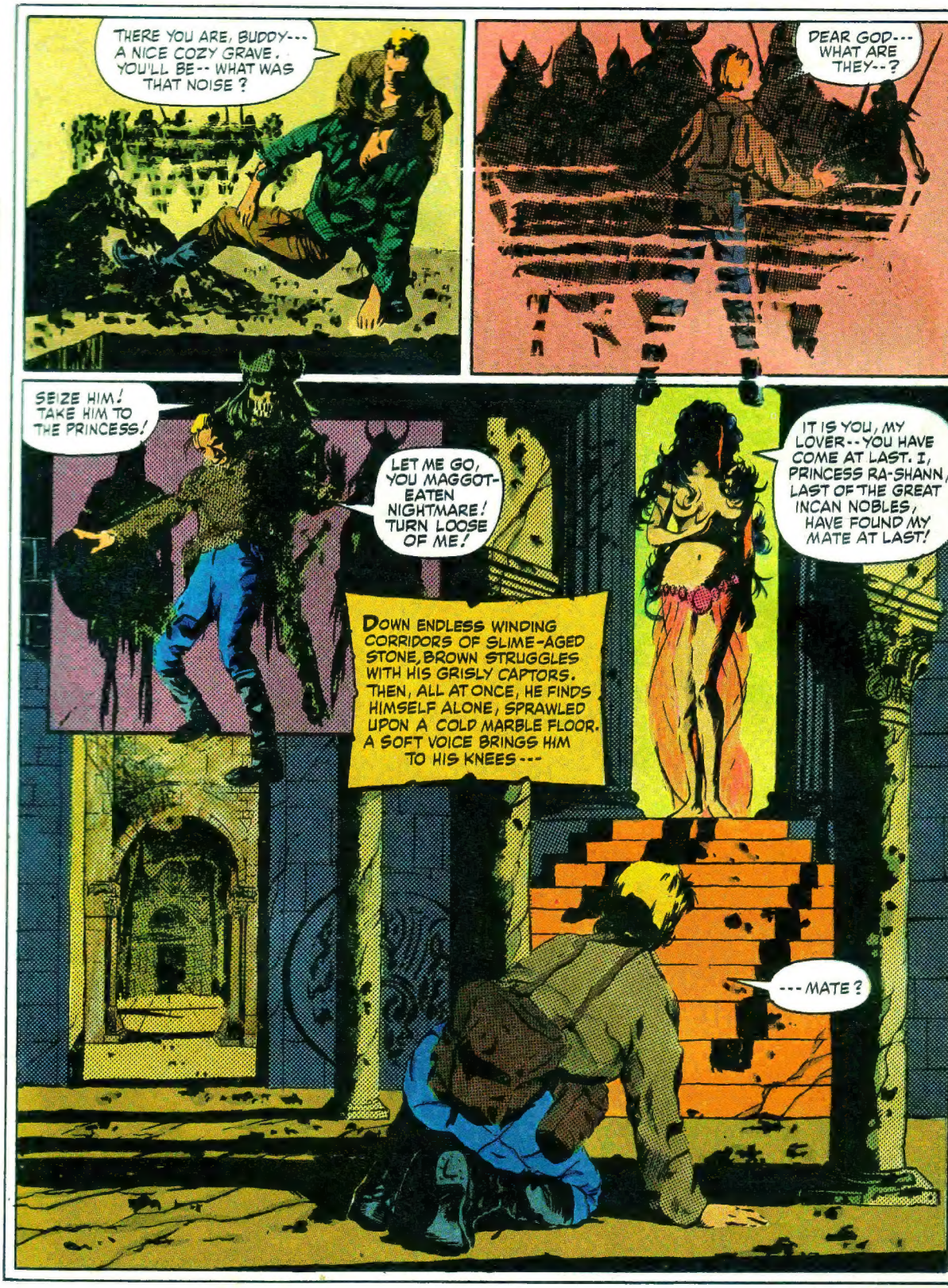
WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF TIME, WAYNE. C'MON, LET'S FOLLOW THIS OLD TRAIL AND SEE WHERE IT LEADS---
WELL, OF ALL THE---

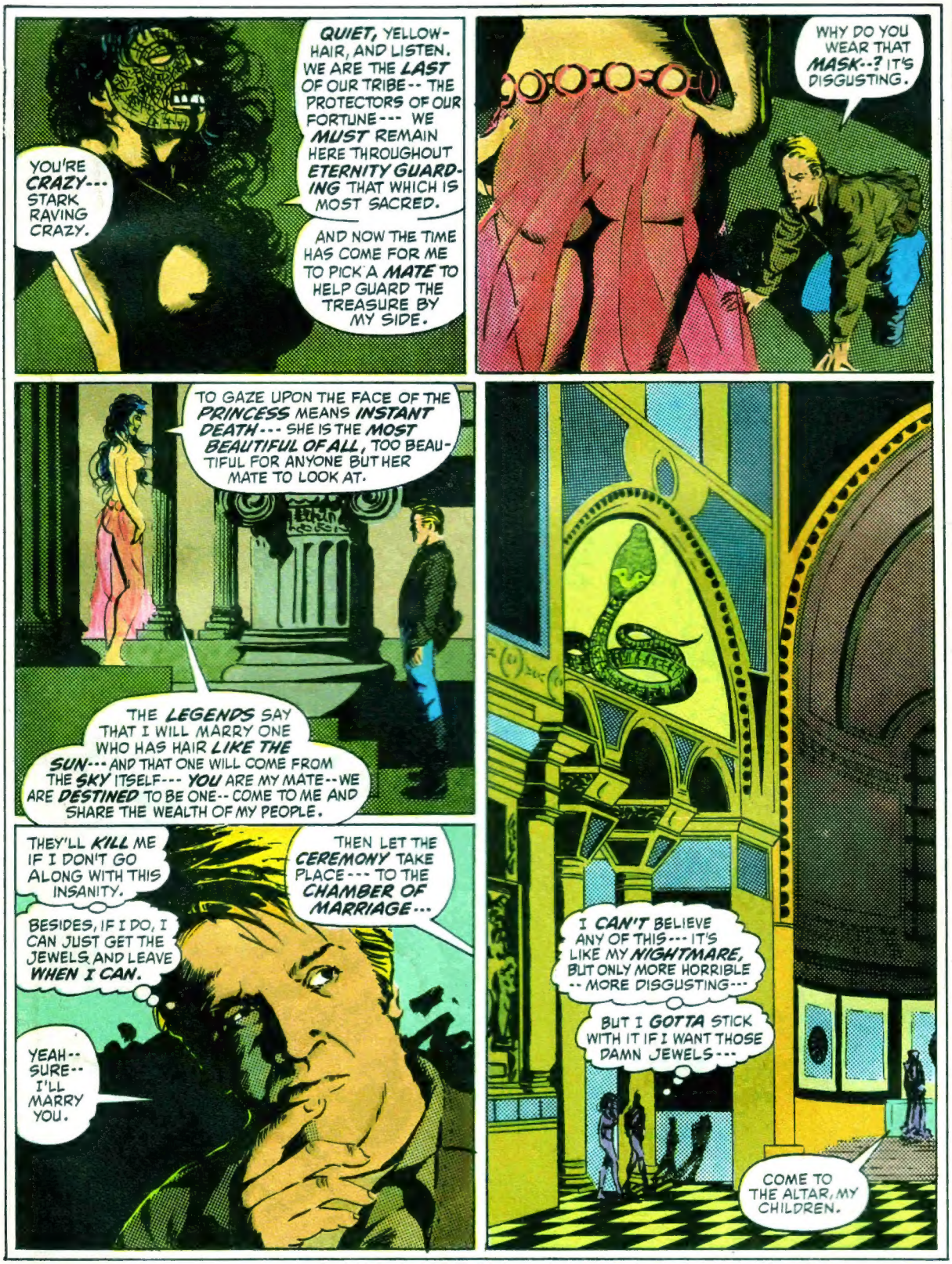
I TELL YOU, WAYNE, I'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS JUNGLE BEFORE--- SOMETIME---
WHO'RE YOU KIDDING? THIS IS YOUR FIRST TRIP TO PERU. C'MON, LET'S GET BACK---
WAIT A SECOND! LOOK! LOOK AT THAT!
WHAT IN HELL DO YOU CALL THAT, WAYNE?
PROBABLY SOME OLD INCAN IDOL-- THEY'RE ALL OVER THE COUNTRYSIDE AROUND HERE! SO WHAT?
R-R-RUMBLE!
THE GROUND! -- IT'S CRACKING! WHAT IN BLAZES---?
HEY, LOOK AT THIS, WAYNE! THE STONE IS LOOSE HERE--- I'M GONNA BREAK OFF A PIECE FOR A SOUVEN---
THE EARTH BENEATH THEIR FEET BEGAN TO TREMBLE SUDDENLY, THEN HEAVE UPWARD. IN THE NEXT MOMENT IT SHUDDERED AND GAVE WAY! THE TWO TERRIFIED MEN FOUND THEMSELVES SPINNING DOWNWARD TOWARD AN ENDLESS ABYSS---

YOU OKAY, WAYNE?
N-NO-- LEG'S BROKE --CAN'T MOVE. YOU'LL HAFTA CARRY ME.
WE'RE JUST LUCKY TO BE ALIVE;--- LOOK AROUND YOU.
YEAH, WE'RE LUCKY, ALL RIGHT-- WE'RE SO LUCKY WE'RE TRAPPED ONLY GOD KNOWS WHERE! WILL WE EVER FIND A WAY OUT?
LOOK, THERE'S A LIGHT AHEAD--- MAYBE THAT'S THE WAY OUT---
SNAKES!!
CAN'T REACH MY GUN-- COILS IN THE WAY-- ONLY CHANCE-- IF I CAN STUN IT--- CRUSH ITS HEAD---
WORKED-- I'M FREE, BUT WAYNE'S STILL IN TROUBLE-- BUT NOT FOR LONG!--
BANG!

YOU OKAY?
SURE-- I'M READY TO RUN THE MILE IN 3.8! HEY, REALLY-- GOOD GOING--- THOUGHT I WAS A GONER THERE FOR A SECOND.
LET'S GET MOVING. THE SOONER WE GET OUTTA HERE, THE BETTER I'LL FEEL.
IT'S GETTING LIGHTER--- I THINK WE'RE ALMOST--
FREE? BROWN--- LOOK AT THAT! I MUST BE DREAMING--- TELL ME I'M DREAMING, BROWN --- TELL ME.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT--- TREASURES FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE WORLD--- ALL GATHERED IN ONE FANTASTIC CHAMBER---

THEY'RE REAL--- ALL OF THEM. REALER THAN ANYTHING, AND WORTH MORE THAN ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD. YAA HAA!! WE'RE RICH-- RICH! RICH!!!!
NOT US, BUDDY BOY--- ME! I'M TAKIN' IT ALL. I'M DISSOLVIN' THE PARTNERSHIP AS OF RIGHT NOW.
YOU MISSED, WAYNE--- YOUR LEG MUST'VE THROWN YOU OFF BALANCE. AND YOU'RE NOT GETTING ANOTHER CHANCE TO TRY YOUR LUCK---
BANG! BANG!
IT'S BEEN A NICE PARTNERSHIP, WAYNE. SORRY TO SEE IT END.
ACCCKKKK!!!
TO BE HONEST WITH YOU, WAYNE-- I WAS GOING TO KNOCK YOU OFF ANYWAY. WITH THAT BROKEN LEG OF YOURS, YOU WERE JUST TOO MUCH DEAD WEIGHT.
I'LL DIG A GRAVE AND GET YOU OUTTA THE WAY--- THAT WAY I DON'T HAVETA LOOK AT YOU.


THERE YOU ARE, BUDDY--- A NICE COZY GRAVE. YOU'LL BE-- WHAT WAS THAT NOISE ?
DEAR GOD--- WHAT ARE THEY--?
SEIZE HIM! TAKE HIM TO THE PRINCESS!
LET ME GO, YOU MAGGOT-EATEN NIGHTMARE! TURN LOOSE OF ME!
IT IS YOU, MY LOVER--YOU HAVE COME AT LAST. I, PRINCESS RA-SHANN, LAST OF THE GREAT INCAN NOBLES, HAVE FOUND MY MATE AT LAST!
DOWN ENDLESS WINDING CORRIDORS OF SLIME-AGED STONE, BROWN STRUGGLES WITH HIS GRISLY CAPTORS. THEN, ALL AT ONCE, HE FINDS HIMSELF ALONE, SPRAWLED UPON A COLD MARBLE FLOOR. A SOFT VOICE BRINGS HIM TO HIS KNEES---
---MATE ?


QUIET, YELLOW-HAIR, AND LISTEN. WE ARE THE LAST OF OUR TRIBE -- THE PROTECTORS OF OUR FORTUNE --- WE MUST REMAIN HERE THROUGHOUT ETERNITY GUARDING THAT WHICH IS MOST SACRED.
AND NOW THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO PICK A MATE TO HELP GUARD THE TREASURE BY MY SIDE.
YOU'RE CRAZY--- STARK RAVING CRAZY.
WHY DO YOU WEAR THAT MASK--? IT'S DISGUSTING.
TO GAZE UPON THE FACE OF THE PRINCESS MEANS INSTANT DEATH --- SHE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF ALL, TOO BEAUTIFUL FOR ANYONE BUT HER MATE TO LOOK AT.
THE LEGENDS SAY THAT I WILL MARRY ONE WHO HAS HAIR LIKE THE SUN--- AND THAT ONE WILL COME FROM THE SKY ITSELF--- YOU ARE MY MATE -- WE ARE DESTINED TO BE ONE -- COME TO ME AND SHARE THE WEALTH OF MY PEOPLE.
THEY'LL KILL ME IF I DON'T GO ALONG WITH THIS INSANITY.
THEN LET THE CEREMONY TAKE PLACE --- TO THE CHAMBER OF MARRIAGE...
BESIDES, IF I DO, I CAN JUST GET THE JEWELS AND LEAVE WHEN I CAN.
YEAH -- SURE -- I'LL MARRY YOU.
I CAN'T BELIEVE ANY OF THIS --- IT'S LIKE MY NIGHTMARE, BUT ONLY MORE HORRIBLE -- MORE DISGUSTING---
BUT I GOTTA STICK WITH IT IF I WANT THOSE DAMN JEWELS ---
COME TO THE ALTAR, MY CHILDREN.

IN THE NAME OF GREAT AKA-RHAN I WED THEE FOR ALL ETERNITY AS MAN AND WIFE, PRINCE AND PRINCESS, THAT YOU MAY SIT ON THE THRONES OF THE SACRED FOR ALL TIME --- EMBRACE, MY CHILDREN, AND CONSUMMATE THE MARRIAGE--- PRINCESS RA-SHANN, REMOVE YOUR CEREMONIAL MASK--
A-AHHH!
LET ME OUTTA HERE! I'M NOT MARRYIN' ANY GHOUL ---!
COME BACK! COME BACK! THE CEREMONY IS DEFILED!

NO WALKING ZOMBIES ARE HOLDIN' ME. I'LL JUST GRAB SOME OF THESE GOODIES AND SPLIT OUTTA HERE BEFORE THOSE TOTTERING FREAKS CATCH UP.
WAYNE'S GRAVE! I'M FALLING--!
WHY DID YOU RUN, MY DARLING? WE ARE AS ONE NOW--- FOR-EVER! COME, KISS YOUR LONGING WIFE---
NO! NO! STAY AWAY FROM ME! I CAN'T STAND THE SIGHT OF YOU--!
NO? BUT WE CAN FIX THAT, MY DARLING---
WHY ARE YOU NOT SMILING, GARY BROWN? CAN'T YOU SEE-- YOU HAVE ALL THE THINGS A MAN COULD EVER WISH FOR?-- A PRINCESS FOR A WIFE, A KINGDOM--- A WEALTH OF TREASURE--- CAN'T YOU SEE, GARY BROWN--- CAN'T YOU SEE---?
End.

STARCHILD

CYX HAD BEGUN TO FEAR THEY WOULD NEVER FIND A SUITABLE PLANET, THAT THEY WOULD SIMPLY DRIFT ENDLESSLY THROUGH SPACE UNTIL THE CHILD GREW OLD AND WITHERED AND... DIED.

NOW, AFTER SEVENTEEN YEARS, HIS SENSORS BEGAN TO BLINK AND THROB, IMPRINTING NECESSARY DATA ON HIS MEMORY BANKS. TIME TO TELEPATHICALLY STIR THE CHILD FROM UNTROUBLED DREAMS...

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY BRUCE JONES

AWAKEN, CHILD-- WE WILL DESCEND UPON THE PLANET BELOW IN A FEW HOURS. AWAKEN AND REMEMBER ALL YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT. ACKNOWLEDGE...

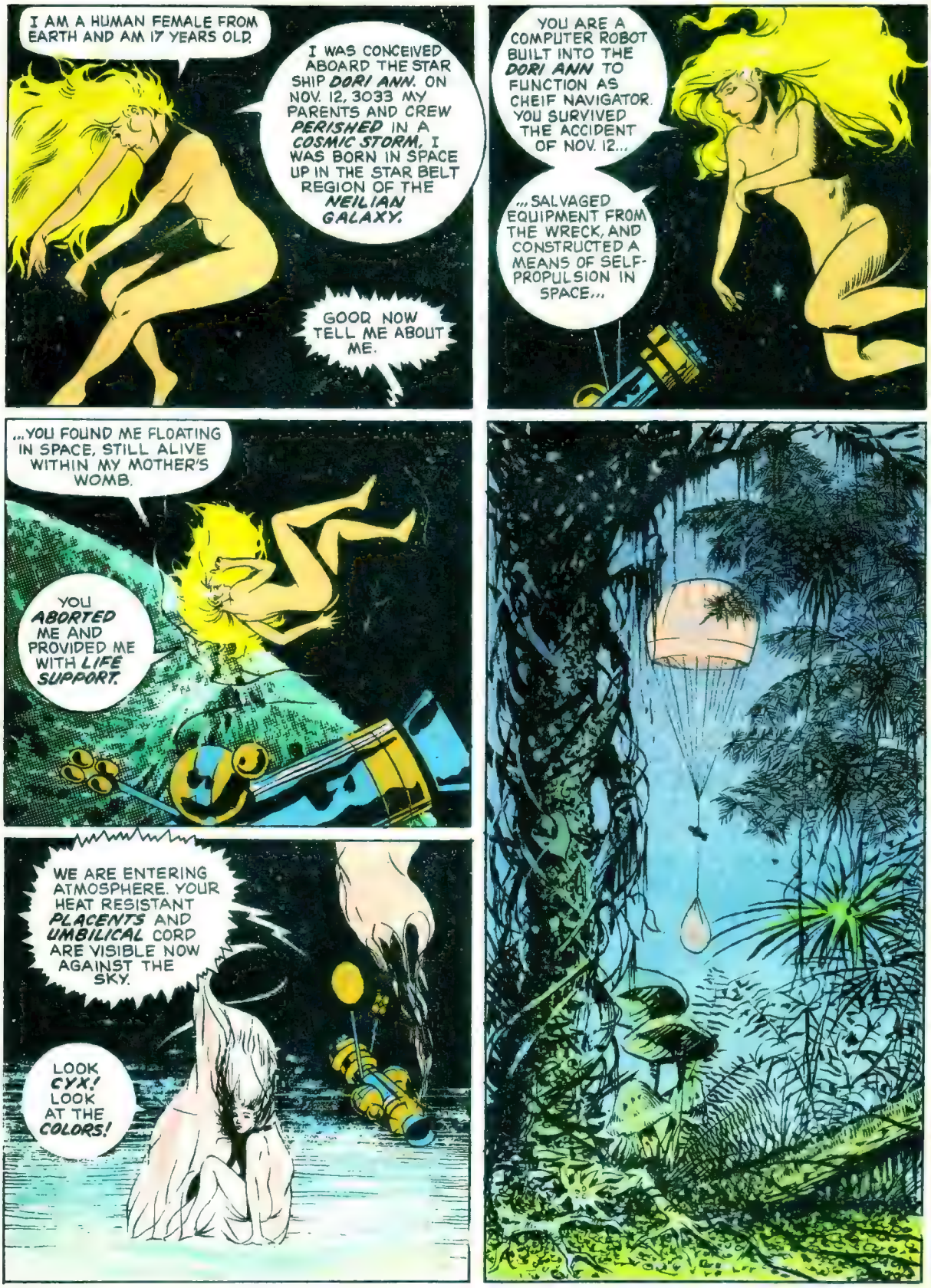
I AM AWARE. OH, HOW LOVELY... ARE THESE... *STARS*?

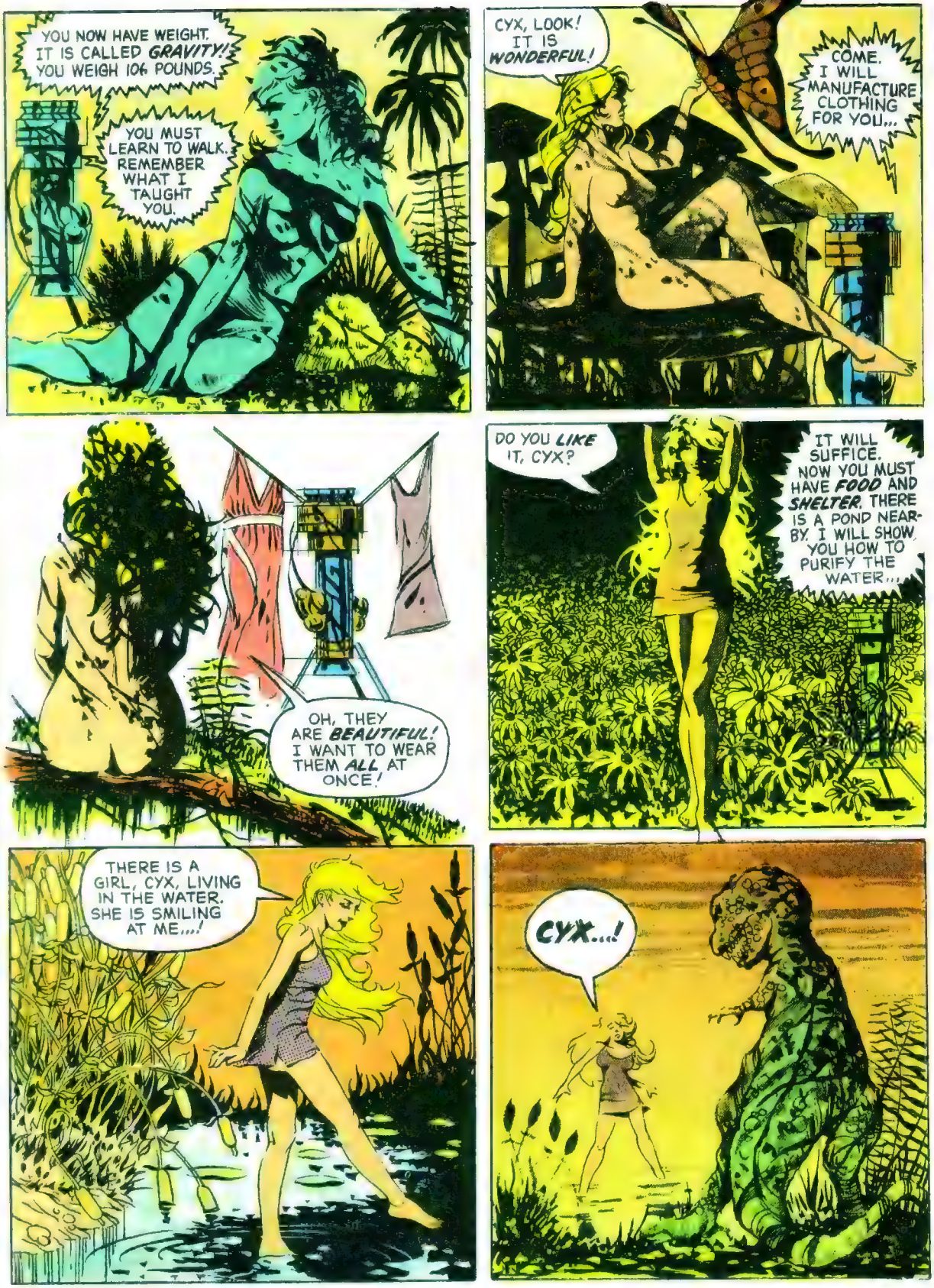
GOOD. YOUR VOICE IS CLEAR, RESPONDING EXCELLENTLY. YES, THEY ARE STARS AND THIS IS SPACE. THE SPHERE BELOW IS A PLANET CAPABLE OF SUSTAINING YOU.

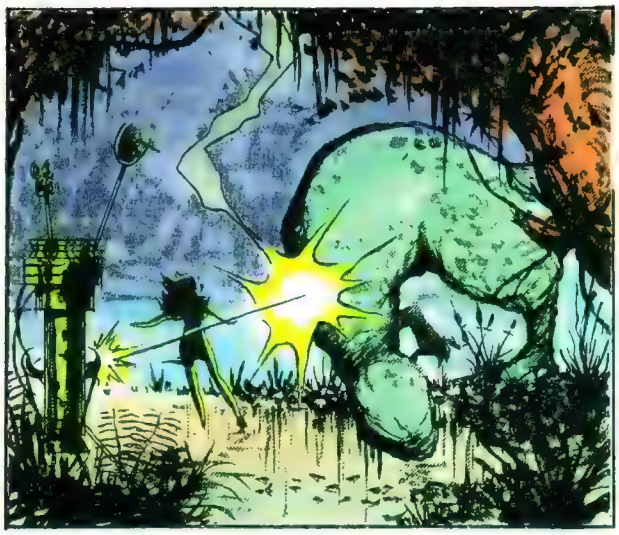
I SEE YOU NOW... THE SMALL METALIC CYLINDER. YOU ARE A *CYXBRETNIC 7-400-G*. I AM TO CALL YOU *CYX*. CORRECT?

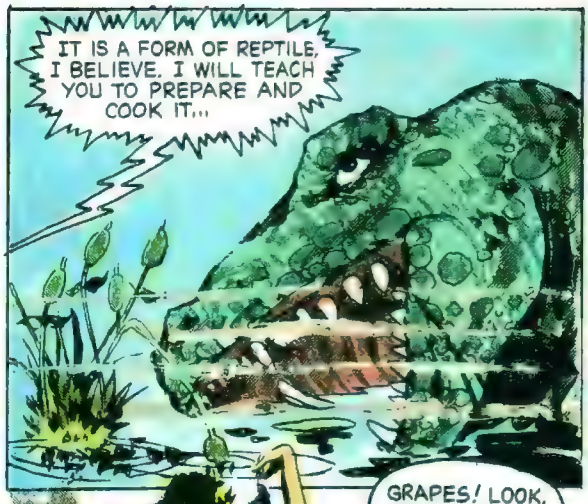
EXCELLENT. . .YOUR RETENTION IS PERFECT. RECITE FOR ME WHILE WE DESCEND...

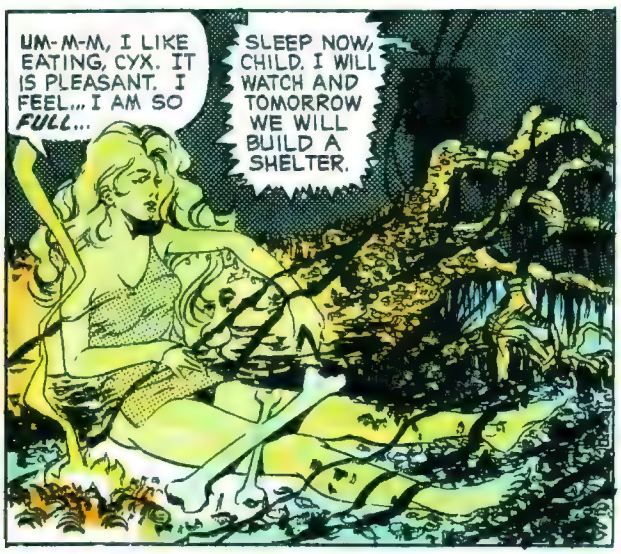
Colors: TIM SMITH


I AM A HUMAN FEMALE FROM EARTH AND AM 17 YEARS OLD.
I WAS CONCEIVED ABOARD THE STAR SHIP DORI ANN. ON NOV. 12, 3033 MY PARENTS AND CREW PERISHED IN A COSMIC STORM. I WAS BORN IN SPACE UP IN THE STAR BELT REGION OF THE NEILIAN GALAXY.
GOOD NOW TELL ME ABOUT ME.
YOU ARE A COMPUTER ROBOT BUILT INTO THE DORI ANN TO FUNCTION AS CHEIF NAVIGATOR. YOU SURVIVED THE ACCIDENT OF NOV. 12...
...SALVAGED EQUIPMENT FROM THE WRECK, AND CONSTRUCTED A MEANS OF SELF-PROPULSION IN SPACE...
...YOU FOUND ME FLOATING IN SPACE, STILL ALIVE WITHIN MY MOTHER'S WOMB.
YOU ABORTED ME AND PROVIDED ME WITH LIFE SUPPORT.
WE ARE ENTERING ATMOSPHERE. YOUR HEAT RESISTANT PLACENTS AND UMBILICAL CORD ARE VISIBLE NOW AGAINST THE SKY.
LOOK CYX! LOOK AT THE COLORS!


YOU NOW HAVE WEIGHT. IT IS CALLED GRAVITY! YOU WEIGH 106 POUNDS.
YOU MUST LEARN TO WALK. REMEMBER WHAT I TAUGHT YOU.
CYX, LOOK! IT IS WONDERFUL!
COME. I WILL MANUFACTURE CLOTHING FOR YOU...
OH, THEY ARE BEAUTIFUL! I WANT TO WEAR THEM ALL AT ONCE!
DO YOU LIKE IT, CYX?
IT WILL SUFFICE. NOW YOU MUST HAVE FOOD AND SHELTER. THERE IS A POND NEARBY. I WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO PURIFY THE WATER...
THERE IS A GIRL, CYX, LIVING IN THE WATER. SHE IS SMILING AT ME...!
CYX...!



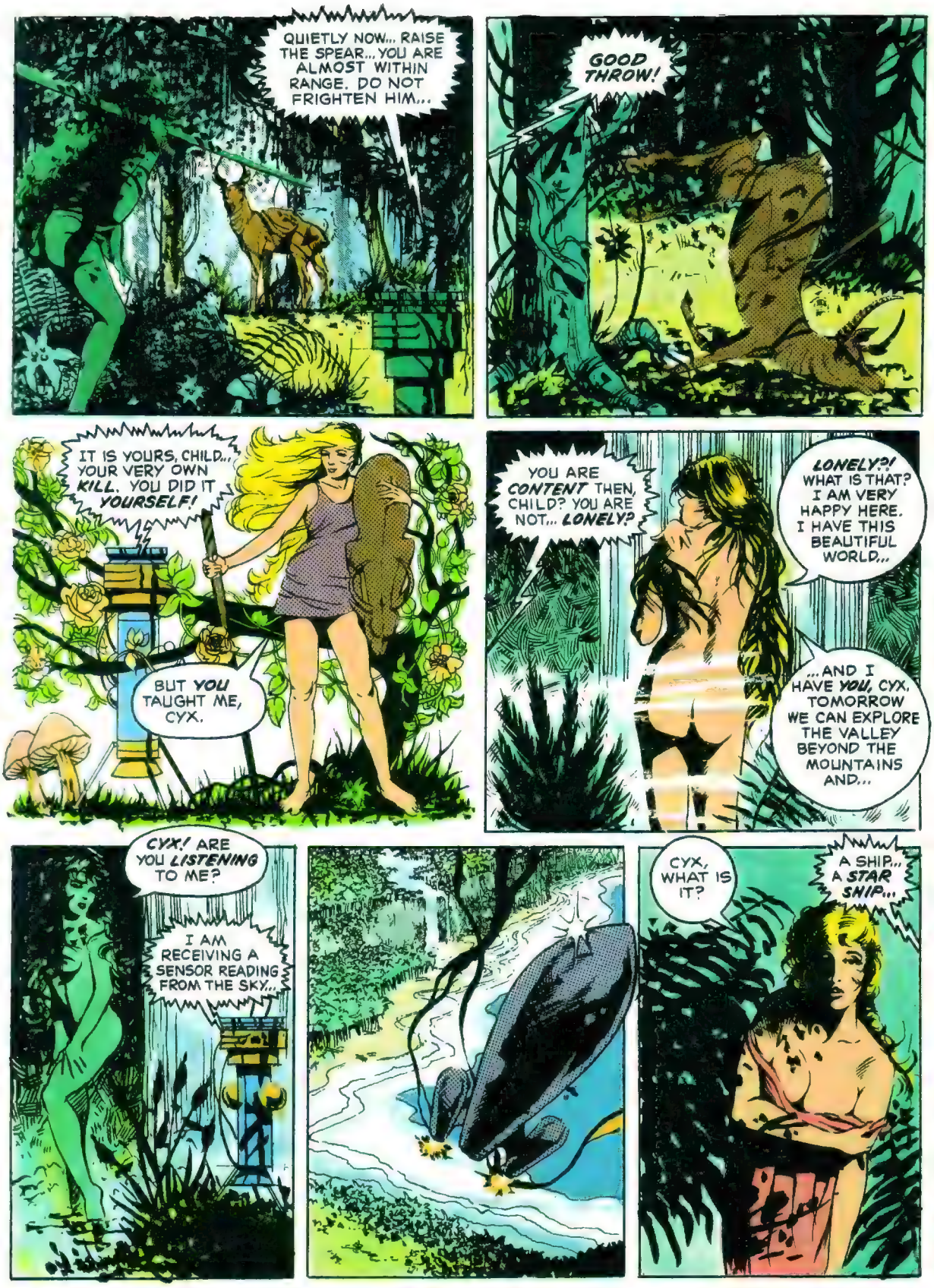

IT IS A FORM OF REPTILE, I BELIEVE. I WILL TEACH YOU TO PREPARE AND COOK IT...


UM-M-M, I LIKE EATING, CYX. IT IS PLEASANT. I FEEL... I AM SO FULL...
SLEEP NOW, CHILD. I WILL WATCH AND TOMORROW WE WILL BUILD A SHELTER.

GRAPES! LOOK, CYX, I FOUND WILD GRAPES!
I SEE THEM. RUN CHILD... RUN AND BE FREE...

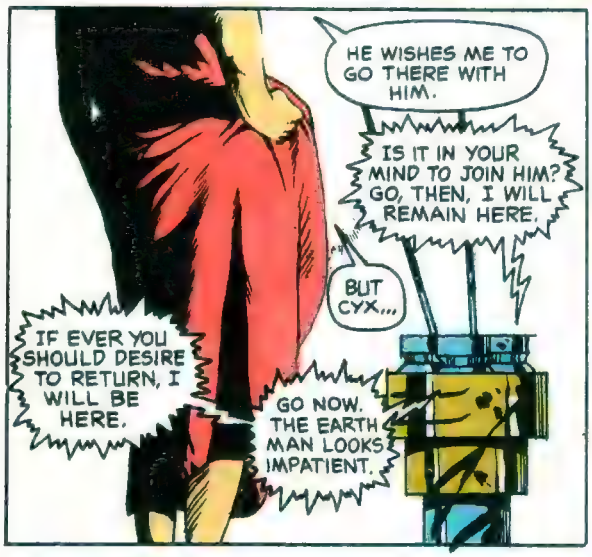
THEY ARE DELICIOUS! I LOVE THIS WORLD, CYX. IT IS BOUNTIFUL AND SWEET...
AND DANGEROUS, WERE YOU ALONE...

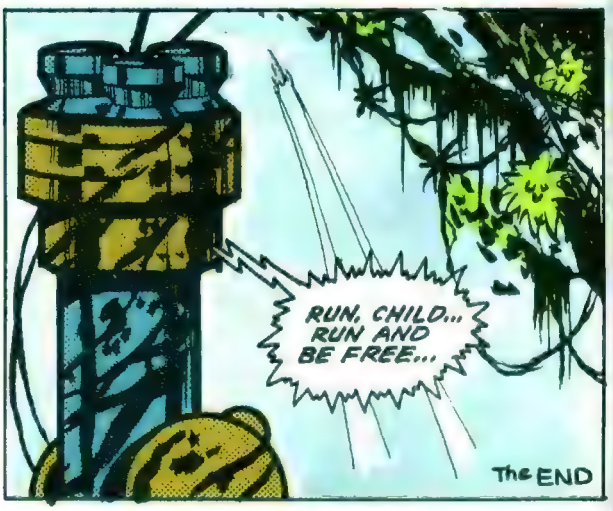
OH, YES, CYX. WITHOUT YOU I WOULD BE LOST! I OWE YOU SO MUCH... STAY WITH ME ALWAYS... NEVER LEAVE ME...
I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU, CHILD! COME, I WILL TEACH YOU MORE...


QUIETLY NOW... RAISE THE SPEAR... YOU ARE ALMOST WITHIN RANGE. DO NOT FRIGHTEN HIM...
GOOD THROW!
IT IS YOURS, CHILD... YOUR VERY OWN KILL. YOU DID IT YOURSELF!
BUT YOU TAUGHT ME, CYX.
YOU ARE CONTENT THEN, CHILD? YOU ARE NOT... LONELY?
LONELY?! WHAT IS THAT? I AM VERY HAPPY HERE. I HAVE THIS BEAUTIFUL WORLD...
...AND I HAVE YOU, CYX. TOMORROW WE CAN EXPLORE THE VALLEY BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS AND...
CYX! ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?
I AM RECEIVING A SENSOR READING FROM THE SKY...
CYX, WHAT IS IT?
A SHIP... A STAR SHIP...

MAN HAS COME TO THE PLANET. GO TO HIM CHILD AND WELCOME HIM. DO NOT BE AFRAID...
I WILL BE WATCHING.

HE IS FROM EARTH, CYX. HIS NAME IS LEE AND HE LIVES IN A PLACE CALLED...CITY.


HE WISHES ME TO GO THERE WITH HIM.
IS IT IN YOUR MIND TO JOIN HIM? GO, THEN, I WILL REMAIN HERE.
BUT CYX...
IF EVER YOU SHOULD DESIRE TO RETURN, I WILL BE HERE.
GO NOW. THE EARTH MAN LOOKS IMPATIENT.


RUN, CHILD... RUN AND BE FREE...
The END

A ROTTN'

DEAL

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
BRUCE JONES

THE BROILING DESERT SUN BEAT DOWN RELENTLESSLY ON THE SMALL ENCAMPMENT TENT NESTLED SECURELY BESIDE THE SHIMMERING OASIS. WITHIN ITS CANVAS CONFINES THE OLD MAN'S VOICE BROKE THE HEAVY SILENCE OF THE WASTELANDS.
FELIX TOWNSEND PULLED THE HEAVY DESERT BOOTS ON WITH A GROAN AND ADDRESSED HIS YOUNG NEPHEW PETER WITH AN AGED SMILE...
ACCORDING TO THE MAP THAT OLD PROSPECTOR SOLD ME, THE MINE IS ABOUT FIVE DAYS JOURNEY FROM HERE!
YOU SENILE OLD GOAT. ANY FOOL KNOWS THAT "LOST MINE" ROUTINE IS THE OLDEST CON GAME IN THE WORLD...AND YOU PAID FIFTY BUCKS FOR THE MAP...

THE AGING UNCLE'S WRINKLED HAND OPENED HIS FIELD JACKET AND PATTED THE SHEATH OF PAPERS IN ITS LINING. HE NODDED AT PETER...
YOU'VE BEEN GOOD COMPANY TO AN OLD MAN THESE LAST FEW YEARS, PETER. I'M SHOWING MY APPRECIATION BY REMEMBERING YOU IN MY WILL!
MAP OF REGION
PETER STARED HUNGRILY AT THE PAPERS. HE'D WAITED MONTHS JUST TO HEAR THOSE WORDS. THE LONG HOURS OF BOREDOM WITH HIS UNCLE HAD PAID OFF...
OUR JOURNEY WILL BE MADE ON FOOT, PETER. THE TERRAIN IS TOO ROUGH FOR ANY VEHICLE.
THE WATER HOLES ARE SPACED ALMOST EXACTLY A DAY APART! WE HAVE ONE CANTEEN APIECE. BE SURE TO RATION YOUR WATER ACCORDINGLY...
PETER HAD SHRUGGED IN AGREEMENT. HE FIGURED THE OLD MAN WOULDN'T LAST THREE HOURS IN THE SWELTERING HEAT AND WOULD ABANDON THE CRAZY SCHEME BEFORE THE DAY WAS OUT. BUT THE WITHERED DESERT RAT PROVED HEALTHIER THAN HIS NEPHEW HAD ANTICIPATED AND IT WAS PETER WHO STUMBLED TO HIS KNEES IN EXHAUSTION BY MID-AFTERNOON...
I'M DYING! HAVEN'T HAD A DRINK IN THREE HOURS... C-CAN'T MAKE IT!
GET UP, BOY! WE CAN'T STOP NOW! I TOLD YOU TO CONSERVE YOUR WATER...
THERE... UP AHEAD! IT'S THE FIRST OASIS!

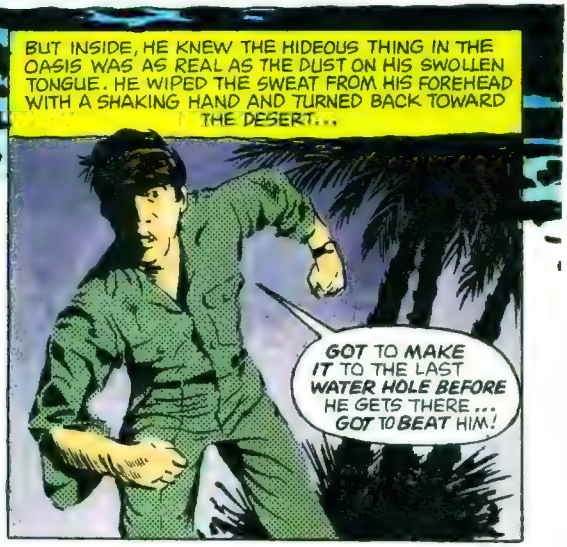
SO IT WENT. AT THE END OF EACH SCORCHING DAY A SHIMMERING POOL OF LIFE-GIVING WATER LAY WAITING FOR THEIR THIRSTY BELLIES AND EMPTY CANTEENS. BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE THIRD OASIS, PETER'S PATIENCE AND STRENGTH WERE WEARING THIN...
WHY SHOULD I WAIT? I'LL BE AN OLD MAN MYSELF BY THE TIME HE KICKS THE BUCKET. IF I PLANNED IT RIGHT IT WOULD LOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT!
IS THAT YOU, NEPHEW-- UHHH!
WHO ELSE, YOU STUPID OLD FOOL!
PETER! WHY?...
BECAUSE I'M TIRED OF WAITING, UNCLE FELIX!
HIS CANTEEN!
PETER STRUCK THEN, AGAIN AND AGAIN WITH THE JAGGED ROCK, UNTIL THE CLEAR DESERT POOL MUDDIED CRIMSON AND THE OLD MAN'S LIFE EBBED AWAY IN A FEEBLE TRAIL OF BUBBLES. A BRIGHT GLINT OF METAL WINKED AT PETER FROM BENEATH THE RIPPLING SURFACE.
PETER REACHED DOWN AND LIFTED THE SHINY RECEPTACLE FROM THE QUIET FORM...
YOU WON'T NEED THIS NOW, UNCLE, AND IT'LL MAKE THE RETURN TRIP TWICE AS EASY ON ME!

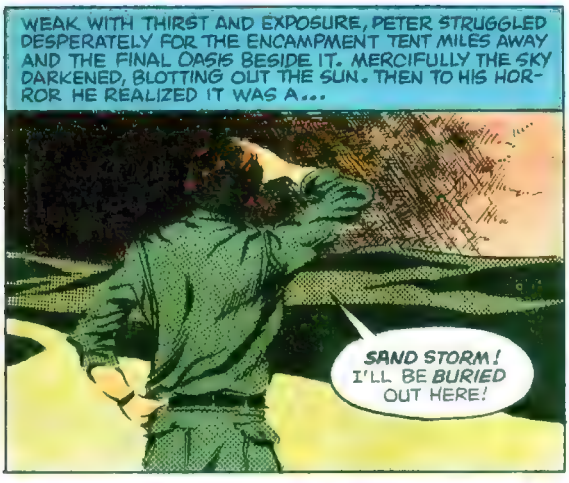
BY MID-AFTERNOON OF THE NEXT DAY PETER WAS GREEDILY EMPTYING HIS OWN CANTEEN INTO HIS DUSTY GULLET. IT SEEMED TWICE AS HOT NOW AS THE DAY BEFORE...
BLASTED HEAT! GOOD I'VE GOT PLENTY OF WATER!
THERE SHE IS! AND IT'S ABOUT TIME!
THE COOLING WATER HAD ALMOST TOUCHED HIS LIPS WHEN SOMETHING CAUGHT HIS ATTENTION FROM THE CENTER OF THE OASIS. THE BLOATED PULPY FIGURE BOBBED TO THE SURFACE AND STARED HIDEOUSLY AT HIM WITH SIGHTLESS EYES...PETER SCREAMED...
UNCLE FELIX! MY GOD! HOW IN THE NAME OF HADES DID HE GET HERE?
COYOTES MUST HAVE DRAGGED HIM HERE LAST NIGHT! LORD HE STINKS! I CAN'T DRINK THE WATER NOW...HIS CORPSE HAS POLLUTED IT!
I'VE STILL GOT HIS CANTEEN! I CAN MAKE IT ON THAT!..TRAVEL BY NIGHT! YOU OLD VULTURE... I'M NOT LICKED YET!

SO HE WALKED INTO THE FREEZING DESERT NIGHT, HIS UNCLE'S CANTEEN SWINGING BESIDE HIM. BY SUNRISE THE LAST OF THE PRECIOUS WATER HAD PASSED OVER HIS PARCHED LIPS ...HE SEARCHED THE HORIZON DESPERATELY!
THAT'S IT! I'D BETTER BE ON THE RIGHT TRAIL!
THE OASIS! THERE IT IS!
NO!
NO!

THE REEKING SLIME-COVERED HEAD FLOATED LAZILY IN THE WATER, ITS ROTTED FLESH FILLING THE DESERT AIR WITH STOMACH-CHURNING ODOR, TAINTING THE COOL LIQUID AROUND IT WITH PUTRESCENCE. PETER SHUDDERED, CHOKING BACK HIS VOMIT...

HIS HEAD BEGAN TO SWIM AS THE GROTESQUE FACE DANCED BEFORE HIM, GRINNING IDIOTICALLY...
THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING! I'M GOING MAD FROM THIRST! THAT'S IT! HE'S A MIRAGE!


BUT INSIDE, HE KNEW THE HIDEOUS THING IN THE OASIS WAS AS REAL AS THE DUST ON HIS SWOLLEN TONGUE. HE WIPED THE SWEAT FROM HIS FOREHEAD WITH A SHAKING HAND AND TURNED BACK TOWARD THE DESERT...
GOT TO MAKE IT TO THE LAST WATER HOLE BEFORE HE GETS THERE... GOT TO BEAT HIM!


WEAK WITH THIRST AND EXPOSURE, PETER STRUGGLED DESPERATELY FOR THE ENCAMPMENT TENT MILES AWAY AND THE FINAL OASIS BESIDE IT. MERCIFULLY THE SKY DARKENED, BLOTTING OUT THE SUN. THEN TO HIS HORROR HE REALIZED IT WAS A...
SAND STORM! I'LL BE BURIED OUT HERE!

PETER FASTENED HIS BANDANA ABOUT HIS FACE AND PUSHED INTO THE BLINDING, WHIRLING SAND. IT WAS THEN HE NOTICED THE DIM SILHOUETTE MOVING ALONG BESIDE HIM...
SOMEONE'S OUT THERE!

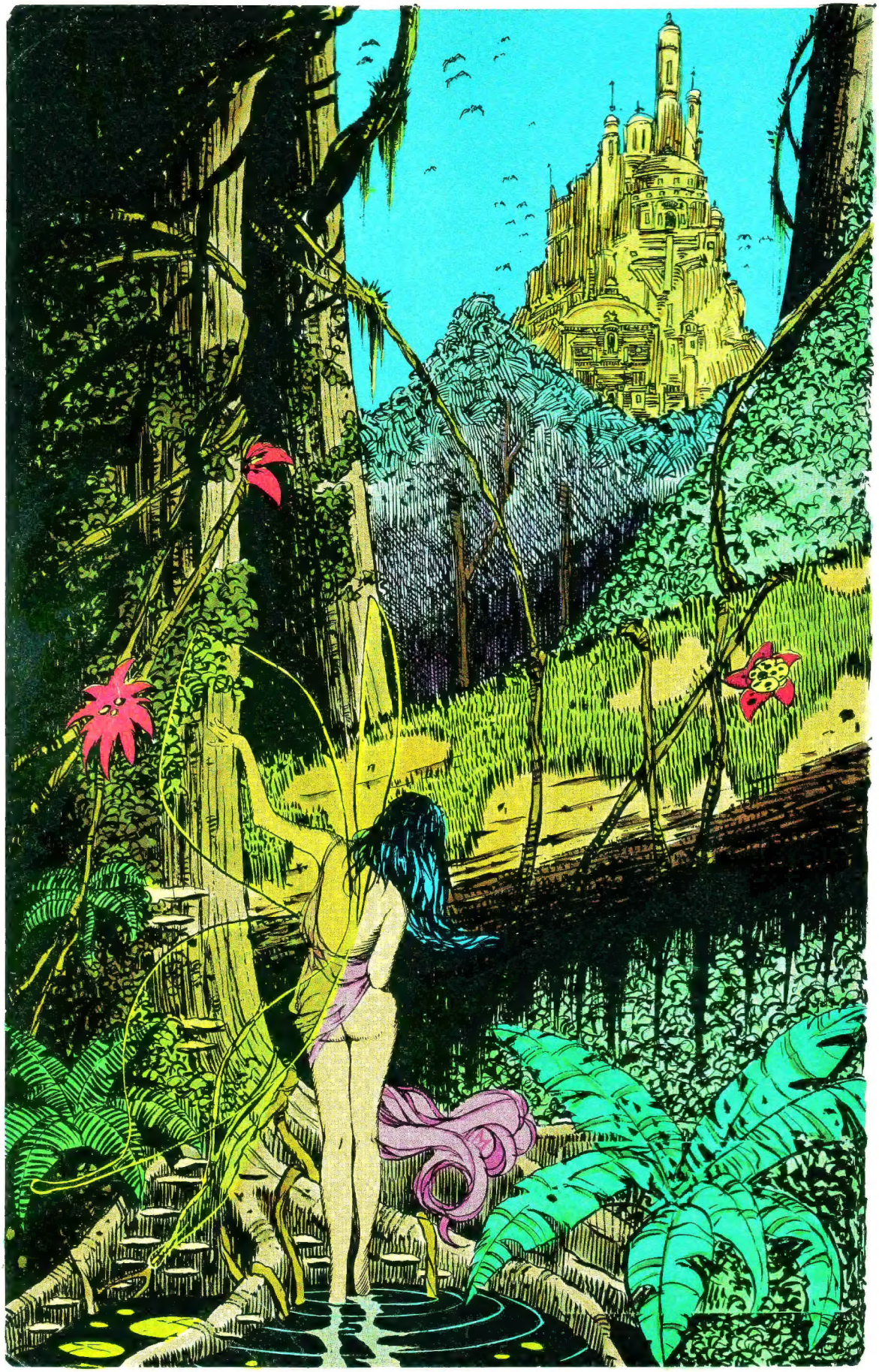
HE SQUINTED INTO THE HOWLING GALE AND DREW CLOSER TO THE STUMBLING FIGURE. FROM OUT OF THE SWIRLING STORM LOOMED THE HORRID MUTILATED FACE...

THE ROTTED TEETERING THING WAS KEEPING PACE WITH HIM, CHUNKS OF DECAYING FLESH AND MAGGOTY BONE FALLING FROM ITS STUMBLING HULK, LEAVING A TRAIL OF RANCID GORE BEHIND IT...
UNCLE FELIX!! ÷CHOKE÷ HE'S TRYING TO BEAT ME TO THE WATER!
PETER DROVE HIMSELF ON THE QUAKING LEGS, A COLD FEAR CLUTCHING HIS HEART...
CAN'T LET IT WIN!..GOT TO OUTDISTANCE HIM!

SEEMINGLY YEARS LATER THE STORM ABATED. PETER, CRAWLING ON BLOODIED HAND HANDS AND KNEES, GAZED ABOUT HIMSELF DELIRIOUSLY...
WAS IT AN HALLUCINATION? DID I JUST IMAGINE-- WHAT'S THIS? TRACKS! GOD, IT'S AHEAD OF ME!
WITH A STRENGTH BORN OF MADNESS, PETER PUSHED UP AND HOBBLED AFTER THE GRISLY TRAIL LEFT BY THE THING. MILES LATER HE FOUND IT, TRUDGING RELENTLESSLY ON, FILLING THE ACRID AIR WITH ITS STENCH...
IT HASN'T REACHED THE OASIS YET!
THE LAST OF HIS WILL FADING, PETER SCRAMBLED CRAZILY ACROSS THE BURNING SAND, PASSED THE GRINNING HORROR, AND FELL HEADLONG INTO THE RELIEF-GIVING POOL...
SCOOPING FRANTICALLY WITH TORN FINGERS HE FILLED HIS ACHING STOMACH WITH THE COOLING LIQUID UNTIL HIS GUTS BURNED AND LUNGS BEGGED FOR AIR...THEN HE LAY GIGGLING QUIETLY...
HEH-HEH-HEH!
THERE WAS A NOISE BEHIND HIM, SHUFFLING OF DRY DECAYED FEET. PETER TURNED IN TIME TO SEE THE CORPSE OF HIS UNCLE TOPPLE INTO THE OASIS...
HA-HA! I WON, YOU BLOATED HORROR! I'VE HAD MY DRINK ALREADY...HEH-HEH... I BEAT YOU!

REVIVED NOW, FLUSHED WITH VICTORY, PETER WALKED ON UNSTEADY LEGS TO THE SHADE OF THE TENT AND THREW OPEN THE FLAP. IT TOOK A MOMENT FOR HIS EYES TO ADJUST THEMSELVES TO THE DARKNESS WITHIN, THEN HE ENTERED...
WITH SHAKING FINGERS HE WITHDREW THE SHEATH OF PAPERS FROM THE OLD MAN'S JACKET AND OPENED IT...
AT LAST... ALL MINE!...
WHA...THIS ISN'T A WILL... IT'S A MEDICAL REPORT!
LAVERNE RESEARCH
MR. FELIX TOWNSEND
428 ORIPAWA LANE
PHOENIX, ARIZONA
DEAR MR. TOWNSEND:
THIS IS TO CONFIRM EARLIER PROGNOSIS O
YOUR CONDITION. AFTER EXTENSIVE TEST
OUR FINDING INDICATE MARKED EVIDENC
HANSEN'S DISEASE WHICH YOU CONTRA
SOME MONTHS AGO
AGGH-H-HH!
LEPROSY! HIS CANTEEN! I...I DRANK FROM HIS--
--C...CANTEEN...
The END

interlude

COLORS BY TIM SMITH

BARRY JONES